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Review of Heinzelmann's "Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century"

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MARTIN HEINZELMANN, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, Christopher Carroll, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp. xii + 235. \$59.95.

Reviewed by Caitlin Corning, George Fox University

This book is an analysis of the underlying themes and organization of the narratives in Gregory of Tours's *Ten Books of History*. Heinzelmann argues Gregory did not plan to present an objective history of the Merovingian kingdoms, but that he chose and presented narratives in ways that upheld the aims of his work. Heinzelmann believes Gregory's main goal was the exploration of the relationship between the kings, bishops, and saints in promoting a Christian society and preparing the community of believers for the Last Judgment.

Heinzelmann's work is divided into four main sections. The first presents a genealogy of Gregory's family and examines his episcopacy from 538–73. The second section analyzes the autobiographical elements of the *Histories* and how these fit into Gregory's aims for books v–x. Heinzelmann sees the theme of books v–vi as the "godless king," referring to the Neustrian King Chilperic, and his relationship to the bishops, including Gregory. Books v–vi contrast with books vii–ix where the subject is the godly king Guntram of Burgundy and his positive associations with the bishops. Book x is focused on the Last Judgment and the role of the *ecclesia* in history. Heinzelmann also explores the problems with Gregory's autobiographical statements, pointing out that Gregory alters or is silent about his role in many events in order to support the aims of a specific book or chapter.

Section three of Heinzelmann's book looks at the genre, structure, and plan of the *Ten Books of History* overall. He argues that historians must approach the *Histories* as a unified whole. He convincingly presents the idea that the individual chapters are not linked by chronology, but by the theme of an individual book (115–19). In addition, he claims that historians need to pay much more attention to the role and function of the prologues and the epilogue. By examining these, it becomes clear that Gregory's "Christological and ecclesiological programme is the beginning, end and very essence of [his] historical writing" (128).

Section four examines Gregory's *ecclesia Dei*. Here the author explores Gregory's ecclesiastical aims and how these influenced the social and political messages in the *Histories*. Along with the partnership between the bishops and kings, another of Gregory's goals is the "clericalization of society" in order to establish the kingdom of God (172–81). Heinzelmann believes that Gregory chose the narratives in the *Histories* to fit his "historical and theological projection of a true Christian society on the path to its eschatological fulfillment" (209).

There are many strengths to Heinzelmann's work. His thesis is well supported and clearly argued. Christopher Carroll did an excellent job producing a translation that is straightforward and clearly conveys Heinzelmann's ideas. However, there are a few places where the work could have been stronger. First, the original German version of the book, *Gregor von Tours (538–594): 'Zehn Bücher Geschichte', Historiographie und Gesellschaftskonzept im 6. Jahrhundert* was finished in 1992. The author chose to not update the work for the translation and clearly explains this in the forward. While it is understandable why he did not want to do major revisions to the book and he does add a postscript explaining his own work since 1992, it would have been helpful to have an updated list of publications on this topic since 1992 for those interested in further research on the topic. This could have been added at the end of the bibliography with the clear identification that these works were not used in Heinzelmann's book.

The other problem with this work is that it is at times repetitive. Heinzelmann explores books v–x in section two with regard to Gregory's autobiographical information. These chapters are again examined in section three with concern to the structure of the work and the themes of the chapters. At times, ideas from books v–x have already been stated in section two and are presented again where they fit the new analysis. Restructuring the argument would have reduced the repetition.

One other small suggestion has to do with section one. In this, Heinzelmann

discusses Gregory and his family. He includes a thirteen-page genealogical summary of twenty-one of Gregory's relatives. Much of this information could have been included in an appendix since the importance of these people is not yet clear to the reader. By the time many of these people are mentioned further into the book, the first section has to be referenced again. A rearrangement of this first section would have produced a stronger introduction. This is not to ignore the valuable work Heinzelmann has done in providing short biographies of members of Gregory's extended family.

These small complaints aside, this is an interesting and important work that presents a new way of looking at what Gregory was trying to accomplish in the *Histories*. I would highly recommend it to anyone whose research interests connect with Gregory of Tours and sixth-century Merovingian Gaul.